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Minorities in Germany

The integration dilemma

Both government and immigrants must work harder on integration

Jul 19th 2007 | BERLIN | from the print edition

WHEN Angela Merkel convened an "integration summit" a year ago minorities applauded. The new chancellor was rallying government, business and society to bring immigrants into the mainstream. But when Ms Merkel held a second summit on July 12th the mood had changed. Four Turkish migrant groups boycotted it to show, as Memet Kilic of the German Foreigners' Council puts it, that "migrants are not masochists".

The boycotters are incensed by changes in the immigration law that will make it harder for foreigners, especially Turks, to come to Germany. Migrants from poor countries joining spouses in Germany must now pass a language test before arrival. Foreign spouses must also be at least 18 (to discourage arranged marriages and child brides). To obtain citizenship young foreigners will now need a job, a place in school or a good excuse for having neither. This tightens standards that were loosened in the late 1990s. Turks, the largest migrant group after ethnic Germans from other countries, complain that the measures are aimed at them. "This means: We don't want you," says Özcan Mutlu, a Green member of Berlin's legislature who represents the Kreuzberg district, home to many Turks.

Rejection starts young. Children are only ten (or 12 in Berlin) when their high school is chosen. For nearly half of foreign students it is the *Hauptschule*, which prepares them for low-skilled jobs. Only 14% go to a pre-university *Gymnasium*, compared with a national average of a third. The drop-out rate for children of immigrant backgrounds is three times the national average, says Mr Mutlu.

The differences persist in the job market, even between migrants and German-born citizens with similar education. Unemployment for foreign-born residents with little schooling was 20.3% in 2003-04, compared with 15.6% for people born in Germany, according to the OECD, a Paris-based think-tank. For those with higher education the gap widens: 12.5% for foreign-born residents and just 4.4% for native Germans.

Young Turks can make matters worse. Many native Germans complain that migrants' children do not learn German and are prone to criminality. Only a third of Turks have become German citizens, in part because dual citizenship is not allowed. Many young Turks are more religious than their parents, fuelling fears of a spread of fundamentalism. A plan to build a big mosque in Cologne has sparked protests by right-wing extremists and criticism from leading Catholics and Jews. There are grumbles that Muslim children dodge sports and biology classes for religious reasons, though Mr Mutlu claims that only 68 of Berlin's 70,000 immigrant students did this. Some 2.5m Turks have gone home since the early 1960s. Most new legal immigration consists of family reunions.

The idea that Turks, who began arriving nearly 50 years ago, are an indigestible minority is belied by countless success stories. But what is astonishing, says Kay Hailbronner, of the University of Constance, is that, after so much time, integration "partly didn't happen."

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The government's response has been to issue a sort of German dress code. Immigrants "are welcome, but you also have to get to know our culture," says Wolfgang Schäuble, the interior minister, who rejects the growth of "parallel societies". The first integration summit led to 400 proposals, which were launched at the second with a promise of €750m (\$1 billion) a year to pay for them. They include ideas such as expanding language and culture training and steps to raise employment. But the appeal of such measures is undone by the changes to the immigration law which, unlike the integration plan, were adopted without consulting immigrants' representatives. The government is not wrong to want immigrants to be good Germans. But Germany also needs to be a better host.

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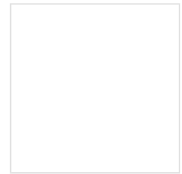
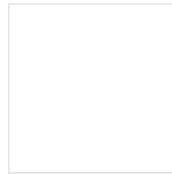
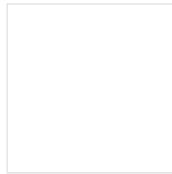
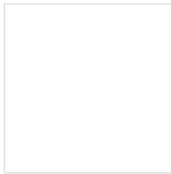
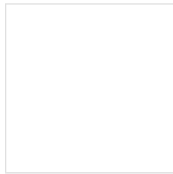
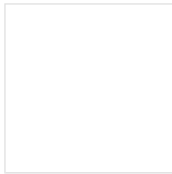
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